

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 EB-08 TRSE-00 /067 W
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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9539
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USNATO
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, UK
SUBJECT: ANNUAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE

SUMMARY: AT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE, MARGARET
THATCHER PROVED THAT SHE IS IN COMMAND OF THE TORIES AS
ELECTIONS LOOM, PERHAPS NEXT YEAR. SHE CLEARLY HAS CON-
VINCED HER PARTY, IF NOT YET THE NATION, THAT SHE IS A
CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO CALLAGHAN. END SUMMARY.

1. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ASSEMBLED AT BLACKPOOL
OCTOBER 11-14 WITH ONE CENTRAL OBJECTIVE: UNITY. IT
SOUGHT PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL CONSENSUS IN AN
ATMOSPHERE THAT ANTICIPATED ELECTIONS AS EARLY AS NEXT
YEAR, WHICH MADE MOST SPEAKERS FROM BOTH THE FLOOR AND
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THE DAIS SEEM DETERMINED TO SPACKLE WHATEVER CRACKS MIGHT
WEAKEN THE FACADE OF THE PARTY. NOW IS THE TIME, THEY
SAID, NOT FOR SQUABBLES AND RIVALRIES BUT FOR UNITY AND
LOYALTY.

2. THE BROADLY PHRASED RESOLUTIONS PASSED BY THE CON-
FERENCE FELL JUST SHORT OF ENDORSING MOTHERHOOD AND

MANAGED TO SUBSUME CONFLICTING INTERESTS. THE DISCUSSIONS SERVED TO REAFFIRM THE VAGUE OUTLINES OF CONSERVATIVE ORTHODOXY, AND SPEECHES FROM THE FLOOR FOR THE MOST PART WERE DOCTRINAIRE WITHOUT BEING DOGMATIC. EVEN THE DEBATE ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, WHICH THE PRESS HAD FORESEEN AS A POSSIBLE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE MODERATE FORCES OF JIM PRIOR AND THE RIGHT WING FOLLOWING OF KEITH JOSEPH, TURNED OUT TO BE AN EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE THAT THE TORIES CAN WORK WITH THE UNIONS IN A PRACTICAL WAY AND AT THE SAME TIME PROTECT THE LIBERTIES OF INDIVIDUAL WORKERS. THIS WAS THE MESSAGE PARTY LEADERS WANTED TO CONVEY TO VOTERS WHO, REMEMBERING THE HEATH GOVERNMENT'S FATAL CONFRONTATION WITH THE UNIONS, REGARD IT AS ONE OF THE TORIES' MOST VULNERABLE POINTS.

3. CONSERVATIVE TRADE UNIONISTS, WHO PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME SEEMED TO BE MORE THAN JUST TORY WINDOW DRESSING, TOLD THE DELEGATES TO LEAVE UNION AFFAIRS TO THE UNIONS AND CHILLINGLY WARNED THAT IF THE PARTY INSISTED ON RAMPAGING AGAINST THE CLOSED SHOP, THEN IT WOULD LOSE THE ELECTIONS. IN THE END, PRIOR'S SPEECH RECEIVED THE ACCLAMATION OF THE AUDIENCE, AND TALK OF AN INCIPIENT REBELLION BY THE RANK-AND-FILE OR OF HIS OWN DEPARTURE FROM THE SHADOW CABINET DIED AWAY IN THE APPLAUSE. THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE SHADOW CABINET LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ANNOUNCED BY PRIOR IS ONE OF OPPOSITION IN PRINCIPLE TO THE CLOSED SHOP BUT ALSO A DETERMINATION THAT IT WOULD BE "IMPRACTICAL" TO PROHIBIT BY LAW.

4. REFLECTING THE PREOCCUPATION OF THE NATION, ECONOMIC THEMES CHARACTERIZED MANY OF THE DEBATES. LOWER TAXES, GREATER INCENTIVES, FREER ENTERPRISE, TIGHTER MONEY -- ALL FAMILIAR CONSERVATIVE POSITIONS -- REAPPEARED IN SPEECH AFTER SPEECH. BEFORE THE CONFERENCE OPENED, PRIOR, JOSEPH, GOEFFREY HOWE AND DAVID HOWELL PUBLISHED A DOCUMENT CALLED "THE RIGHT APPROACH TO THE ECONOMY" WHICH FURTHER ELABORATED THESE CONSERVATIVE PRINCIPLES. (A SEPARATE TELEGRAM WILL DEAL WITH THIS DOCUMENT.) THATCHER AND OTHERS STRESSED THAT THE IMF AND NOT THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS IMPOSED FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ON BRITAIN, AND ONCE THIS INTERNATIONAL STRAIGHTJACKET IS LOOSENED, THE SOCIALISTS WILL INEVITABLY RETURN TO THEIR PROFLIGATE WAYS. TORIES ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT WHILE THE GOVERNMENT'S FISCAL HOUSE HAS BEEN FORCED INTO TEMPORARY ORDER, THE BASIC PROBLEM OF THE ECONOMY -- LOW PRODUCTIVITY -- REMAINS AND CAN ONLY BE ADDRESSED BY SOUND CONSERVATIVE POLICIES.

5. MOST OTHER DEBATES TOOK UP POPULAR TORY CAUSES: THE
RE-INTRODUCTION OF DIRECT GRANT SCHOOLS TO THE EDUCATION

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SYSTEM; THE SALE OF COUNCIL HOUSING TO TENANTS; AND LAW
AND ORDER -- WHICH PRODUCED THE RITUAL CALLS FOR RE-
IMPOSITION OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT. WHITELAW, RESPONDING
FOR THE SHADOW CABINET, CALLED FOR POLICE PAY INCREASES
SUBSTANTIALLY ABOVE THE 10 PERCENT NATIONAL GUIDELINES.
THE CONSERVATIVES REITERATED THEIR COMMITMENT TO A
STRONG DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT (LONDON 17123) AND TO AN
INTEGRATED EUROPE (BUT NOT TO TED HEATH'S APPEAL FOR
DIRECT ELECTIONS BASED ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION,
ALTHOUGH DOUGLAS HURD SAID TORY MPS WOULD ENJOY A FREE
VOTE ON THIS QUESTION). THE MOST CONTENTIOUS ISSUE IN
THREE DAYS OF DEBATES WAS RHODESIA, WHERE A CLEAR
GENERATION GAP EMERGED BETWEEN ANTI-SMITH YOUNGER TORIES
AND THE PRO-SMITH SYMPATHIES OF THE VAST MAJORITY WHO
RAILED AGAINST "OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE" IN RHODESIA'S
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AFFAIRS. LORD CARRINGTON, SPEAKING FOR THE SHADOW CABINET, DEFTLY EVADED CRITICISM OF THE CURRENT ANGLO-AMERICAN INITIATIVE AND CALLED FOR A SETTLEMENT ACCEPTABLE TO ALL RHODESIANS WHICH WOULD ASSURE SECURITY OF BLACK AND WHITE ALIKE.

6. COMMENT. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS RECOVERED CONSIDERABLY FROM THE SHOCK AND DISARRAY OF 1974. THE PROSPECT OF EARLY ELECTIONS WAS ENOUGH TO SUBMERGE MOST OF THE DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION, AND THE CONFERENCE SEEMED TO HAVE ACHIEVED COHESION MORE THAN COHERENCE. STILL, MARGARET THATCHER HAS CLEARLY ARRIVED AS LEADER, A ROLE IN WHICH SHE IS NOW BOTH COMFORTABLE AND CONFIDENT. TED HEATH MOVED ON THE EDGES OF THE CONFERENCE BUT NO LONGER APPEARED TO REPRESENT A PERSONAL OR SYMBOLIC CHALLENGE TO MRS. THATCHER. THERE IS SPECULATION THAT, SHOULD THE CONSERVATIVES WIN THE ELECTION, SHE WOULD OFFER HIM THE FOREIGN OFFICE AS A GESTURE OF GOODWILL AND PARTY SOLIDARITY. HER CLOSING SPEECH TO THE CONFERENCE WAS THE BEST EVER IN THE MEMORY OF SOME VETERANS OF TORY PARTY CONFERENCES. SHE HAS CONSOLIDATED HER AUTHORITY; SHE IS IN COMMAND. AND SHE HAS AT LEAST CONVINCED THE PARTY, IF NOT YET THE NATION, THAT SHE IS A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO CALLAGHAN.

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